

Careful scrutiny of these six standards, as illustrated in Figure 1, immediately reveals the interdependence of each standard. For example, effective decision making, appropriate staffing, meaningful recognition and authentic leadership depend upon skilled communication and true collaboration. Likewise, authentic leadership is imperative to ensure sustainable implementation of the other behavior-based standards.

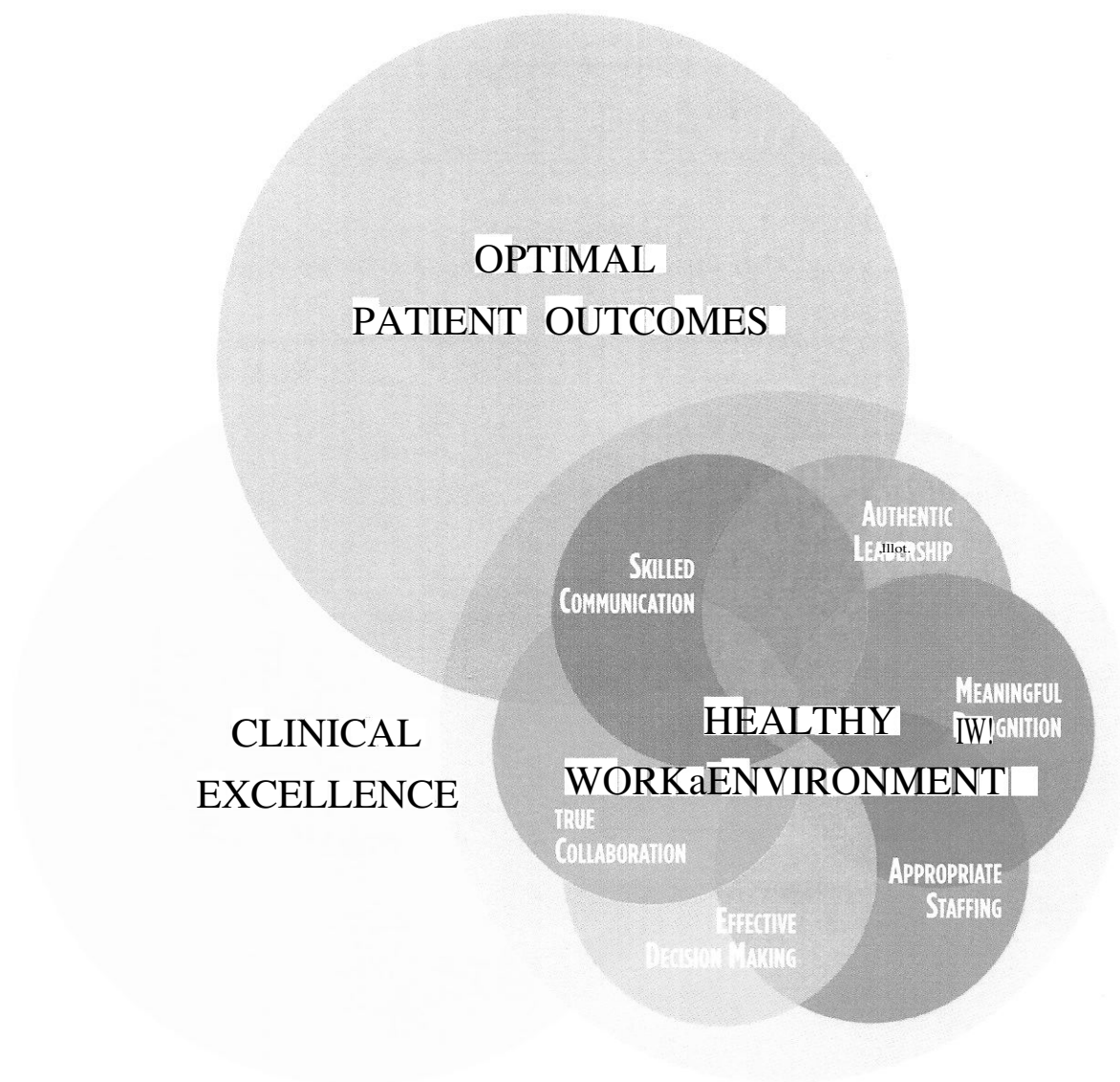


figure 1

Interdependence of Healthy Work Environment, Clinical Excellence and Optimal Patient Outcomes.

standard 4

APPROPRIATE STAFFING

STAFFING MUST ENSURE THE EFFECTIVE MATCH BETWEEN PATIENT NEEDS AND NURSE COMPETENCIES.

appropriate
(ə-prō'prē-īt)

*Suitable for achieving
a particular end*

Inappropriate staffing is one of the most harmful threats to patient safety and to the well-being of nurses. Evidence suggests that better patient outcomes result when a higher proportion of care hours is provided by registered nurses, as compared with care by licensed practical nurses or nursing assistants.¹ The likelihood of death or serious complications after surgery increases when fewer nurses are assigned to care for patients.² Further research supports a relationship between specialty certification and clinical nursing experience.^{3,4}

Because nurses intercept 86% of all medication errors made by other professionals, an increase in these errors will likely occur when nurses are overworked, overstressed and in short supply.⁵ Inadequate staffing leads to nurse dissatisfaction, burnout and turnover.² Nurse turnover jeopardizes the quality of care, increases patient costs and decreases hospital profitability.⁶

Staffing is a complex process with the goal of matching the needs of patients at multiple points throughout their illness with the skills and competencies of nurses. Because the condition of critically ill patients rapidly and continuously fluctuates, flexibility of nurse staffing that goes beyond fixed nurse-to-patient ratios is imperative.⁷ Relying on staffing ratios alone ignores variance in patient needs and acuity.

Organizations must engage in dramatic innovation to devise and systematically test new staffing models. All staffing models require methods for ongoing evaluation of staffing decisions in relation to patient and system outcomes.⁸ This evaluation is essential in order to provide accurate trend data from which targeted improvement tactics—including technologies to reduce the demand and increase the efficiency of nurses' work—can be undertaken.

"SETTING STAFFING LEVELS THAT TAKE INTO ACCOUNT THE COMPLEXITIES OF PATIENT NEEDS AND NURSES' SKILLS AND COMPETENCIES MUST ALSO BE PART OF THE SOLUTION."

-Joint Commission on Accreditation of Healthcare Organizations